



DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND ZONING

301 King Street
Room 2100
Alexandria, VA 22314

Phone (703) 746-4666
Fax (703) 838-6393

www.alexandriava.gov

April 22, 2010

Ms. Faroll Hamer, Director
City of Alexandria
Department of Planning & Zoning
301 King Street, Room 2100
P.O. Box 178
Alexandria, VA 22313

Re: North Potomac Yard Small Area Plan

Dear Ms. Hamer:

From October 2008 through February 2010, the Potomac Yard Planning Advisory Group (advisory group) worked together with City staff, consultants, and community members to create a vision for the future of North Potomac Yard (Landbay F). This vision is intended to transform the 600,000 sq ft. suburban shopping center into a walkable, transit-oriented 21st century urban community. The Plan is intended to be a framework to create one of the most sustainable series of neighborhoods within the region, known for its outstanding Four Mile Run waterfront, parks, new Metrorail station, and innovative architecture. While the Plan proposes a significant amount of additional density, the Plan provides appropriate transitions and is protective of the character of the surrounding neighborhoods.

The proposed Plan is a long-term vision which was created through numerous meetings which involved the advisory group, adjoining communities and civic associations. The advisory group included members from all of the adjacent communities, developers and property owners, and many of the key sectors of Alexandria including business, education, housing, and transportation. Meetings and workshops featured lively debate about the complex issues associated with all aspects of planning. Members engaged in discussions that included urban design, city policies, development economics and Metro financing, transportation, and other topics.

In addition, three members of the group participated in the Metrorail station technical feasibility analysis, a parallel effort which looked at cost, constructability, and financial issues associated with a potential new Metrorail station, which informed the Small Area Plan process.

This letter summarizes the process, activities, deliberations, and major conclusions of the advisory group and expresses the advisory group's general support for the proposed North Potomac Yard Small Area Plan. Although the support was not unanimous for all of the topic areas, there is general agreement among the members of the advisory group that the Plan provides a progressive vision for the City while also being respectful of the neighborhoods and context that adjoin the site, and established city policies such as the Economic Sustainability Task Force recommendations, Strategic and Eco-City Plans.

I. Potomac Yard Planning Advisory Group Mission

The group was established as a 20-member group of residents, property owners, members of the business community, Alexandria City Public Schools, and representatives of interest groups. I served on the group as a member of the Planning Commission and had the pleasure of serving as chair. The group advised city staff in preparing the plan for redevelopment of North Potomac Yard. The resolution establishing the group described its functions to:

- Identify and study the issues, challenges and opportunities presented by the redevelopment of Potomac Yard.
- Bring community values, knowledge and ideas into the process of creating a plan that takes advantage of opportunities to improve the area in ways that provide lasting benefit to the local community and City as a whole.
- Based on the members' interests, local knowledge, values and ideas, advise the City staff on options for the future of the planning area, and assist staff in developing policy recommendations in the variety of subject areas required for a plan.
- Weigh the desirability of a new Metrorail station.
- Keep the public informed about the Potomac Yard planning processes and issues, advise the civic and business groups represented by the advisory group's members about the progress of the plan, and review with their constituents issues raised that may be of interest.

II. Major Potomac Yard Planning Advisory Group Initiatives

- *PYPAG Meetings.* Thirteen full group meetings and one site tour were held between October 2008 and February 2010. The advisory group members reviewed detailed background information and held in-depth discussions on a wide variety of topics related to planning.
- *Guiding Principles Subcommittee.* Met four times from December 2008 through February 2009 to draft a proposed overall vision and guiding principles based on advisory group and community input.

- Transportation Subcommittee. Met four times throughout 2009 to review transportation issues, provide input to the traffic study analysis, explore potential transportation impacts, and provide feedback on potential mitigation measures.
- Design Subcommittee. Met two times during the summer of 2009 to review and provide input to design concepts as they were being developed.
- Community Workshops. Two major community workshops were held. The first in January 2009 was attended by over 100 residents and generated key ideas and values that helped to refine the vision, plan principles, and design. The second, in October 2009, was attended by nearly 100 stakeholders and generated direct feedback on the draft design concepts. Both workshops were hosted by the advisory group and members assisted in both preparation and facilitation of the community meetings.
- Metrail Station Feasibility Work Group. Three advisory group members served on this work group. The group met six times over the course of 2009 and worked with city staff, Metro staff, and consultants to explore the technical and financial feasibility of constructing a new station at Potomac Yard. The full advisory group followed these activities closely and considered the final recommendations of this group in its own deliberations.
- Coordination with adjacent jurisdictions and federal agencies. The group supported the active engagement of city and Arlington County staff and WMATA to discuss the transportation network and integration of transit in both jurisdictions. City staff also worked closely with representatives of the National Park Service on the location of the future Metrorail station.
- Outreach to Constituents. The group members reported back to neighborhood associations, boards, and commissions, provided outreach and education through meeting notices and other written updates and correspondence, and brought questions and concerns from stakeholder groups to group discussions. In addition, time was set aside at most advisory group meetings for members of the public to raise questions or make comments.

III. Potomac Yard Planning Advisory Group Recommendations and Conclusions

1. Vision and Plan Principles. The vision and principles are essential to understanding the proposed plan and for guiding future implementation activities. If and when changes to the adopted plan are proposed, the City's policymakers must ask themselves whether such changes are consistent with the principles and how they comport with the Plan's vision. The advisory group approved final language for the vision and principles at its February 2009 meeting. The Vision for North Potomac Yard seeks to create a regional destination with diverse built and natural spaces where

people want to spend time in a wide variety of pursuits. It envisions Potomac Yard as an environmentally and economically sustainable and diverse 21st Century urban, transit-oriented, mixed-use community that is compatible with adjacent neighborhoods. The plan principles became the basis for all future activities of the group and for the design itself. The principles are:

- Create Potomac Yard as a model of environmental sustainability for its site planning, infrastructure, and buildings.
 - Create an economically sustainable development.
 - Promote excellence in design with a new standard in architecture, urban design, and materials that creates a compelling and lasting identity.
 - Create a vibrant and diverse mixed-use community that provides options for living, working, shopping, recreation, culture, and civic uses for a wide range of incomes and ages.
 - Pursue a comprehensive multi-modal approach to transportation based on a highly walkable urban environment, minimal automobile impact, and maximum use of existing and new Metro stations.
 - Create attractive landscaped streets and a network of usable open spaces and parks with a strong connection to Four Mile Run and the Potomac.
 - Provide connections and transitions appropriate to and protective of the character of surrounding neighborhoods.
2. Necessity of Metrorail Station to Landbay F Development. In June 2009, based on the uncertainty of Metrorail funding, the group formalized its position on the importance of the Metrorail station to the vision at Potomac Yard.
- The Metrorail station is a critical component of achieving the long-term vision for the Potomac Yard site.
 - The existing transportation infrastructure cannot support the Landbay F proposed development without construction of the Metrorail station.
 - The level of planned development cannot be supported without the Metrorail station.
 - i. The city must develop a well-planned strategy to bring about a Metrorail station at Potomac Yard. This will require making the Metrorail station a priority.
3. Metrorail Station Location and Timing. Deliberation on this topic continued throughout the process with key inputs provided in June 2009:
- i. The group originally supported options that placed the Metrorail station on the west side of the CSX tracks (inside Potomac Yard). However, station options on the west side of the CSX tracks were subsequently removed by the Metro feasibility workgroup from further consideration due to

technical feasibility issues including cost and development phasing and the group agreed with this assessment. The group supports the current location of the station in the small area plan and supports the idea of multiple access points to the station.

- ii. Phasing and timing of future development are critical considerations for implementation of a Metrorail station. The city should develop a clear implementation strategy and detailed implementation plan including preferred and most likely timeframes for construction and opening of the station.
4. Economic Sustainability of Metrorail Station Financing. In fall 2009, the group applied its principles of economic sustainability to the Metrorail station at Potomac Yard. The group agreed that amendments to the existing Potomac Yard/Potomac Greens Small Area Plan and the rezoning of Landbay F should not go forward until the City is satisfied that an acceptable financing plan has been developed and agreed to and that any proposed financing must be conservative with a sound financing structure and shared risk. The group agreed with the parameters adopted by the Metro feasibility workgroup that current Alexandria taxpayers should not be required to subsidize the cost of the Metro station today or in the future.
5. Managing Transportation and Mitigating Transportation Impacts. Overall, the group recognized that a significant increase in traffic is inevitable due to background traffic growth, traffic from approved (currently unbuilt) developments, and the completion of Potomac Yard, but that the projected level of travel time delay on Route 1 was acceptable. The advisory group spent little time assessing traffic impacts on neighborhoods to the east or west of Potomac Yard. The main recommendations of the group included:
 - i. Maximize access to high-capacity transit options in the corridor and to mitigate traffic impacts to surrounding neighborhoods.
 - ii. A variety of methods to mitigate impacts on local streets were presented by city staff and supported by the group.
6. Overall Support of the North Potomac Yard Small Area Plan. At its final meeting in February 2010, after months of discussion and deliberation, the group expressed overall support for the Small Area Plan, noting that it reflects the vision and the guiding principles. Overall conclusions beyond the Plan principles include general support for the following, under the assumption that a Metro station is built in the location identified in the Plan:
 - i. The 7.5 million square feet of development and 2.5 FAR.

- ii. Overall design and street layout with the inclusion of a “flexible zone” at the metro station to allow city staff and developer to find the best arrangement in keeping with the plan principles.
 - iii. The proposed heights and density are appropriate to the plan and vision.
 - iv. The open space provided is sufficient to the plan, though many members would like to see more open space. Making maximum use of available spaces and taking advantage of non-traditional spaces including rooftops is strongly encouraged. The city also must explore how to provide sufficient access to larger fields that will be necessary with the significant increase in population.
7. Objections to the Small Area Plan. The following concerns were raised by members of the advisory group:
- i. The plan as written is designed around the construction of a new Metrorail station at Potomac Yard. Without that station, the densities and designs are not appropriate and the Plan will not work.
 - ii. A firm recommendation and funding for a proposed east-west road connection to Commonwealth Avenue was revealed and discussed for the first time at the final meeting of the advisory group, even though transportation had been a focus of the group’s activities. As such, this issue was never discussed or properly vetted by the group and raised significant concerns. At least two members of the group were strongly opposed to any such connection and could not support a master plan with such a provision. We understand that the final version of the plan has eliminated this recommendation.
 - iii. The developers at Landbays G and H strongly opposed the proposed tax structure for Metrorail funding and could not support the plan with those conditions.

On balance, a majority of the advisory group supports the adoption of the North Potomac Yard Small Area Plan as proposed and anticipates the redevelopment of the site and construction of a new Metrorail station as envisioned in the Plan. In addition, the goals and recommendations of the Plan need to be incorporated as part of any subsequent rezoning for the property. The Plan presents many long-term policy issues for the City. The advisory group is recommending that the potential short-term and long-term planning, economic development and fiscal issues related to the proposed Metrorail station be carefully considered by the Planning Commission and City Council prior to the adoption of the Plan, particularly in the context of the Plan’s economic sustainability principle.

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On behalf of members of the advisory group, we appreciate the opportunity to participate in the planning process and offer our advice to you and your planning team as the Plan was developed.

Sincerely,



Eric R. Wagner
Chair, Potomac Yard Planning Advisory Group

Potomac Yard Planning Advisory Group Members

Joe Bondi, Lynhaven
Mike Caison, Alexandria Housing Development Corporation
Richard Calderon, Braddock Metro
Steve Collins, Pulte-Centex
Allison Cryor DiNardo, Alexandria Economic Development Partnership
Darryl Dugan, Potomac Greens/Old Town Greens
Garrett Erdle, Rosemont
Bill Hendrickson, Del Ray, PYDAC
Deborah Johnson, Alexandria Chamber of Commerce
Mark Krause, Alexandria City Public Schools
Dan McCaffery, RREEF/McCaffery
Crystall Merlino, At-Large
Jennifer Mitchell, At-Large, Metrorail Station Feasibility Work Group
Peter Pocock, Del Ray
Mariella Posey, Northeast
Frederick Rothmeijer, MRP Realty
Noah Teates, Braddock Metro, Metrorail Station Feasibility Work Group
Maria Wasowski, Business Community, PYDAC

cc: Honorable Mayor William D. Euille and Members of City Council
Chairman John Komoroske and Members of the Planning Commission
James Hartmann, City Manager
Potomac Yard Planning Advisory Group Members
National Park Service
WMATA